

If or when the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) comes to Buffalo County, concerned homeowners might be thinking, “What should I be doing to protect my ash trees from this menacing green insect pest?”



First, I am convinced it is not a matter of if, but more a matter of when. At this moment, EAB is not in Central Nebraska, or so we think. Because of the elusive nature of this insect pest, local detections can take several years. Once an infestation is discovered, it

quickly accelerates and will kill ash trees in a matter of years. Currently, EAB exists in eastern Nebraska and particularly in the counties of Dodge, Washington, Douglas, Sarpy and Cass. It took 16 years and 26 states to get here, but in June of 2016, this dreaded invader set up shop in the Omaha area.

The Nebraska Forestry Service estimates that Nebraska’s forty-four million ash trees are now at risk. These conjectures reveal that over the next 15 years the vast majority of Nebraska ash trees will disappear. If one has ash trees growing in one’s home landscape, I can appreciate the concern in protecting them.

For us living in Central Nebraska, the Nebraska State Forestry service indicates that one should stay calm and for the most part do nothing until the threat of EAB is within 15 miles of one’s landscape. State and federal agencies are diligently monitoring EAB infestations and providing updates on advancing infestations. I can assure you, when the time comes, ash trees will need either to be treated or removed.

Start planning. With such a threat lurking in the shadows, I am reminded of the adage, “The best defense is a good offense.” I interpret this saying

as the best way to attack something successfully is to prepare for it. One such preparation is for homeowners to conduct an inventory of their ash trees and prioritize them. Those ash trees with value and in good health are the ones worth saving. Most homeowners know that a healthy and well-placed tree in the landscape provides shade for the home, screens undesirable views, blocks wind and increases property value. On the contrary, those ash trees, or for that matter, any tree found to be in poor health or growing in a poor location such as under an overhead utility line probably should be removed. If one's assessment reveals ash trees in poor health, or growing in poor locations, immediate removal might be a worthy offensive move. Such action gives one time to select other species for planting and placing in the proper location. Furthermore, it creates a jump-start on establishing a new tree canopy in the landscape.

Considering a chemical treatment to ash trees exhibiting value is definitely an offensive move but currently not necessary. As mentioned earlier, the Nebraska Forest Service is recommending treatment only when the EAB threat is fifteen miles away. Their recommendation strikes a balance between protecting valuable trees and limiting negative results. Treating ash trees outside the fifteen-mile zone provides little or no benefit to the trees, yet exposes humans and the environment to unnecessary pesticides, wastes money and in the case of trunk injections, causes unjustified tree damage.

When the EAB attack finally arrives in Central Nebraska, chemical treatment will be a definite line of defense. Unfortunately, treatments will not be a one-time occurrence. Once EAB is here, treatments to save valuable ash trees will be required every one to two years depending on the type of treatment.

As I began, it is not a matter of if, but, rather, a matter of when. The EAB invasion will ultimately arrive in Central Nebraska. Exactly when is difficult to predict. To protect one's valuable ash trees, I urge homeowners to be proactive —put a plan in place.